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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 004619

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PLAB](#) [ECON](#) [EAID](#) [KWBG](#) [KPAL](#) [IS_GAZA](#) [DISENGAGEMENT](#) [GOI](#) [INTERNAL](#)
SUBJECT: STAFFDEL TALWAR DISCUSSES DISENGAGEMENT AND
ISRAELI POLITICS WITH AMIR PERETZ

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Gene A. Cretz for reasons 1.4 (B)
) and (D).

¶1. (C) Summary: Staffdel Talwar met with Histadrut labor federation leader and candidate for head of the Labor Party Amir Peretz on July 11 to discuss disengagement, the peace process and Israeli politics. Peretz expressed support for disengagement, but was suspicious that the GOI is intentionally increasing tension to alleviate international pressure for additional steps in the West Bank. Calling social issues the key to peace, he suggested that the USG could further assist the peace process by providing additional economic assistance to Israel and hinted that applying diplomatic pressure could be useful. Addressing internal Israeli politics, Peretz accused Labor Party leaders of stealing the leadership race from him and called the Knesset bill that would prohibit anyone from holding a parliamentary seat while serving as the head of Histadrut a "targeted killing." He insisted that he is the best candidate in Labor to advance a social agenda, which he said is only way the party can attract right-wing voters. End summary.

Support for Disengagement and a Palestinian State

¶2. (C) Noting that he lives in Sderot, the town in Israel most often targeted by Qassam rockets from Gaza, Peretz said he supports disengagement even though it leaves his home vulnerable to further attacks. He said he is "a little suspicious" that the GOI wants to provoke a national trauma with disengagement in order to shield itself from outside pressure on West Bank settlements and the security barrier. In his view, ending the disengagement process after Gaza would be "disastrous" and result in another Intifada. The GOI will need broad public support to take the next big step, addressing the West Bank settlements.

¶3. (C) According to Peretz, the majority of Israelis support the peace process. He first espoused an independent Palestinian state in 1984, because it "is in Israel's interests." He called President Mahmud Abbas a "very good partner" worthy of Israeli support. He noted that he had met regularly with Palestinian officials from Tunis while serving as mayor of Sderot, even though his contacts had resulted in his children facing abuse at school. Peretz called social issues the key to attaining peace. He said that when bulldozers start destroying Israeli settlements, he will tell voters "they are burying your future" and stress the large sum of money wasted on the settlements. He suggested that the USG could further assist the peace process by providing additional economic assistance to Israel and hinted that diplomatic pressure could be useful.

Social Issues Key to Labor Leadership and Elections

¶4. (C) Peretz complained that he had been poised to win the leadership of the Labor Party a few weeks ago when other Labor politicians postponed the vote and "stole the election from me." He called the Knesset bill which would prohibit anyone from holding a parliamentary seat while serving as the head of the Histadrut labor federation, a "targeted killing" designed to complicate his leadership bid. He claimed the bill would have ultimately have little effect, because it could be challenged easily before the Supreme Court.

¶5. (C) Maintaining that he is the only Labor leader capable of attracting Likud voters with a social agenda during the general election, Peretz joked, "you need Jesus for the Annunciation." He noted that he had been mayor of Sderot, normally a stronghold for parties on the right of the political spectrum.

Histadrut in Comparison to U.S. Unions

¶6. (C) Peretz explained what he sees as the differences between U.S. and Israeli labor unions. As the head of the main umbrella organization for labor unions in Israel with 700,000 members, he has the legal authority to sign all labor agreements. Histadrut receives all dues and distributes them

to the member unions, further increasing its influence. Contracts signed by Histadrut are binding for all workers in Israel, he said, not just members of its unions.

Biographic Notes

17. (C) Speaking English, but frequently reverting to Hebrew, Peretz sought help from his aides. On several occasions, he quarreled with them over the translations, saying he was looking for a different word. Peretz joked that he had often met Ariel Sharon on weekends, when he would ride his bicycle around Sderot and Sharon would be on his ranch with a four-wheel ATV. Peretz was born in Morocco in 1952 and moved to Israel at the age of four. He was severely wounded in 1974 while serving in the IDF in the Sinai. After a lengthy rehabilitation, he was mayor of Sderot from 1983-1988. First elected to the Knesset in 1988 on the Labor ticket, he formed his own workers party in 1999 before rejoining Labor in 2004. He is one of the leading candidates for the Labor leadership.

18. (U) This cable was cleared by staffdel.

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KURTZER